Pat Manson: A Multifaceted Career Devoted to Supporting Research in the Fields of Information and Education

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Abstract

Two of Pat Manson's long-standing colleagues give a summary of her wide-ranging career from her early days in library technology development, through the heady period of European funding for library innovation and latterly into broader issues of communication, learning and internet policies.

Key Words: Pat Manson; European Commission; Library Research

1. Pat Manson's Contributions to European Library Development

Having started her career as a cataloguer, then head of undergraduate services at Southampton University Library (1975–81) she stepped on to the national stage of library innovation in UK in 1981 by becoming Library

Automation Information Officer and editor of VINE[1] under the guidance of Rollo Woods, one of the father figures of library automation (and still going strong at the age of ninety as a concertina player on the folk music scene). As the name of the journal implies its aim was to keep the movers and shakers of the time in touch with each other and up to date with the latest developments. Pat was therefore at the hub of what was a vibrant period of research and experimentation, most of it funded by the British Library Research and Development Department (BLRDD) under the inspirational leadership of the late Brian Perry, who also funded VINE itself.

Those heady times became even headier when the Conservative government in 1982 instigated IT 82, a programme aimed at raising the awareness of IT in the populace as a whole. The current writers Neil McLean, then chief librarian of the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), and Mel Collier, deputy, were able to tap into this funding to create an information centre for library technology with a shop front in Regent Street. Here library automation innovation projects were brought to the attention of professionals and public alike, but it did not stop there. It seemed natural that Pat's activities should move to PCL and so they did from 1984. She was joined there by Anne Ramsden who sadly passed away in 2015. The IT 82 campaign together with BLRDD funding expanded the role of information dissemination and supported a ground-breaking project, OKAPI, described by experts at the time as the first third-generation online catalogue.

Remember however that until then research and innovation had focused primarily on *automation*, meaning the use of technology to manage book libraries. By the late eighties it was possible to see over the horizon to what is now called the digital library and it was time to draw on the much larger resources of the European Commission to begin to realize the dream. After much lobbying and discussion, work was started on preparing a libraries programme for the third framework and Pat went in at the ground level in Luxembourg as external expert (1989–1991) to DG XIII under the IMPACT2 programme (seconded from PCL and later the Polytechnic of the South Bank). She was responsible for commissioning studies, developing the stakeholder network of national libraries and funding pilot projects as preparatory actions for the new libraries programme.

These preparations came to fruition in late 1991 with the launch of the new programme by DG XIII "Libraries networks and services" unit with Pat as

project officer and Ariane Ilyon as head. Pat's role was to supervise imple-mentation of the first EU research actions for ICT and library networking, involving programme planning, monitoring, evaluation procedure defini-tion and stakeholder liaison (libraries and library technology industry). The Action Plan was structured in four action lines within which around 50 shared-cost co-operative projects were launched.[2]

- Action Line 1: Computerised bibliographies: to create, enhance and harmonise machine-readable bibliographies (principally national bibli-ographies user for international bibliographic services) and union cata-logues, as well as the development of tools and methods for retrospec-tive conversion of catalogues of internationally important collections.
- Action Line 2: International linking of systems: to further the inter-national linking of systems holding such source data for specific library functions, and thus foster the development and application of a range of international standards.
- Action Line 3: Innovative library services using the new technolo-gies: to provide for cost-effective, innovative services enabling librar-ies to satisfy user needs more efficiently and visibly and to exploit better the resources already available.
- Action Line 4: Market stimulus in telematic products and services for libraries: to encourage development and production of prototypes of new technology-based products, services and tools specifically for libraries and their more efficient management.

In these action lines the evolution in thinking from the automated library to the beginnings of the digital library can be clearly seen, notably in lines 2, 3 and 4. For colleagues in library and information work and LIBER Quarterly readers this might well be regarded as the most exciting period of Pat's career. Large amounts of money became available over the next decade for library development and, even more importantly, widespread co-operation between countries and regions was required. A whole cadre of professionals evolved who understood not only the potential of technology but also the structures and cultures of each others' countries and learned to work together to great effect. Technology transfer was facilitated, standards were developed and whole new lines of research were instigated.

Pat's role in the great success of these programmes was crucial. Among the officers in the unit she was notable in having the expert background to bring

to the process. She was involved in the programmes from beginning to end: from consultation about the content of successive programmes, to helping and encouraging potential partners to get together, to advising at an early stage whether a project idea fell within the defined action line (not always obvious in the administrative language used) and thus worth pursuing, to helping refine the specification of the selected projects, and then as project officer monitoring progress. Finally of course there were detailed evaluations both at project level and at programme/action line level to be organized. As programmes and frameworks succeeded each other through the nineties and into the next century they became increasingly sophisticated; projects became larger with more partners and proportionally a greater share of a given envelope of funding. Rules evolved, administration became more complex. Pat's role must have become continually more demanding but she was always cheerfully available to explain and to help.

There can be no doubt that during the decade of the nineties the landscape of library and information technology changed radically and, moreover, extremely rapidly. As pointed out by Stork (1998) it had become normal by the turn of the century to talk of digital libraries, whereas at the beginning the concept had only been embraced by a few enthusiasts. To take a small example; the project ELISE which was directed by Collier, one of the current authors, developed the interconnection of image and video banks and harnessed technologies such as thumbnails, which were ground-breaking for libraries then but soon became commonplace in digital libraries and many other applications. It is clear that Action Line 3 of the first programme gave an immense boost to such innovations and without the confidence shown by Pat and the unit team (not without its risks) they would not have happened so quickly.

So rapid indeed was the advent of the digital library that by the end of the nineties its enabling technologies were spreading widely in to domains that had previously been regarded as separate, such as museums, archives and audio-visual applications. It became increasingly difficult and, in fact, inappropriate to talk of library matters in isolation from the broader learning and cultural sectors. What had often started as the convergence of library and IT services in higher education institutions could now be seen reflected in the management of learning or cultural or heritage services in various sectors. Quite rightly, this was reflected in the way the Commission managed its

programmes from 1999 onwards. After the libraries programme Pat moved successively to posts of Research Programme Officer, DG Information Society and Media, responsible for research in technologies for cultural heritage applications, then from 2003 to 2010 Head of Unit, Cultural Heritage and Technology, Enhanced Learning, DG information Society and Media.

This important role covered implementation of those objectives of the ICT theme in the Framework Programmes dealing with Technology Enhanced Learning, including personalisation of learning; adaptive systems (using AI technologies); embedding learning in the workplace, combining learning and training, business process re-engineering and competency management. From 2004 the wheel came full circle and she combined this with Accessing Cultural and Scientific Resources (including digital libraries) and Digital preservation (after transfer of this portfolio and staff from another unit). This included digital libraries research; digital cultural heritage and digital preservation.

From 2011 to 2012 she was Head of Unit, eContent plus and Safer Internet in the DG Information Society and Media, responsible for innovation programmes in the field of digital content, digital libraries and educational resources, including Europeana projects, the Safer Internet Programme, a range of funding actions and self-regulatory initiatives in the field of protection of children online. Finally, to round off her impressive career she was from July 2012 Head of Unit, Inclusion, Skills and Youth in the DG Communications Networks, Content and Technologies, responsible for policy on ICT in education, *Better Internet for Kids*, supporting self-regulation in the industry and strategy for inclusion (people with disabilities, social and economic excluded groups, accessibility, and assistive technologies).

2. Conclusion and Summary

The keys to Pat's most successful career were her pleasant yet formidable personal characteristics. Her bright smile and her empathic personality immediately put others at ease, whether individually or in group settings. Behind this engaging presence, however, was a sharp intellect, an ability to get to the core of the matter and a steely resolve that invariably emerged when difficult decisions needed to be made. The energy and enthusiasm that underpinned

her prodigious output in all her positions of influence were widely admired by her many colleagues across Europe. Her substantial contribution to research and development in the library, learning and cultural domains is a legacy to be cherished by us all.

Reference

Stork, H.-G. (1998). *Ten years of European Commission support to European libraries: results and perspectives*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from http://cordis.europa.eu/libraries/en/fribourg.html.

Notes

[1] Originally a Very Informal Newsletter of Library Automation, currently published as VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management systems http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/eb040570 (accessed 09/02/2016).

[2] http://www.echo.lu/libraries/en/lib-3fp.html (accessed 16/02/2016).